

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
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O 141404Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5114

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 7116

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PLOS, TU, GR

SUBJECT: TURKISH SEISMIC VESSEL IN THE AEGEAN

REF:A) ANAKRA 5356, B) ATHENS 6918, C) ANKARA 5259

1. FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS TELEPHONED ME THIS MORNING TO EXPRESS "GREAT CONCERN" ABOUT THE REPORTED DECISION OF THE TURKISH NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL TO PUSH FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE AEGEAN (REF A). HE POINTED OUT THAT THE DECISION AND ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE TURKISH NSC HAD BEEN A MAJOR NEWS STORY IN GREECE TODAY AND RUMORS WERE SPREADING LIKE WILDFIRE THAT A GREEK-TURKISH CLASH IN THE AEGEAN WAS IMMINENT. BITSIOS SAID THAT HE SIMPLY COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE TURKISH AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO PROVIDE FUEL FOR THESE KINDS OF RUMORS WHICH LEAD INEVITABLY TO INCREASED TENSIONS IN THE AEGEAN. "WE ARE IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH EACH OTHER (TOP LEVEL GREEK AND TURKISH AUTHORITIES," HE SAID, "AND WE ARE TRYING TO RESOLVE OUR DIFFERENCES BY PEACEFUL NEGOTIATIONS. WHY DO THEY (THE TURKS) PROVOKE US IN THIS WAY? WHY DO THEY HAVE TO SEND THIS VESSEL INTO THE AEGEAN AT THIS TIME WHEN WE ARE TRYING TO NEGOTIATE?"

2. BITSIOS SAID HE WAS SENDING AN INSTRUCTION TO
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AMBASSADOR ALEXANDRAKIS IN WASHINGTON TO CONVEY TO THE

HIGHEST POSSIBLE LEVELS OF THE USG HOW "ANXIOUS" THE GREEK GOVERNMENT WAS ABOUT THIS MATTER. HE SAID HE KNEW THAT THE SECRETARY HAD BEEN DOING ALL HE COULD TO DAMPEN DOWN ANY INCIPIENT CRISIS AND HE HOPED VERY MUCH THAT THE SECRETARY WAS BEING KEPT FULLY AND CURRENTLY INFORMED OF THE DEVELOPING SITUATION.

3. I TOLD TIBSIOS THAT I UNDERSTOOD THAT THE TURKISH NSC HAD SIMPLY RECOMMENDED THAT THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCIENTIFIC REPEAT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND ONLY IN TURKISH "TERRITORIAL WATERS AND THE OPEN SEA." I SAID THAT I HAD SEEN NO INDICATION WHATSOEVER THAT THE TURKISH SEISMIC VESSEL INTENDED TO DO MORE THAN CONDUCT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND NO INDICATION THAT IT INTENDED TO ENTER EITHER GREEK TERRITORIAL WATERS OR DISPUTED AREAS. ON THE CONTRARY, I REMINDED TIBSIOS OF THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE IN WHICH IT WAS AFFIRMED THAT WE HAD RECEIVED ASSURANCES FROM THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT THAT IT HAD NO DESIRE TO TEST THE WILL OF GREECE NOR PROVOKE A CONFRONTATION. (REF B) I SAID I THOUGHT THERE WAS ONCE AGAIN AN OVERREACTION IN GREECE THAT IN A SENSE CONTRIBUTED TO THE TURKISH REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND IN KIND, AND I URGED ONCE AGAIN THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT BE AS RESTRAINED AS POSSIBLE IN ITS ACTIONS AND REACTIONS.

4. LATER, I SAW COORDINATION MINISTER PAPALIGOURAS WHO TOLD ME THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT WAS INDEED EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE EVOLVING SITUATION BUT THAT CARAMANLIS HAD GIVEN THE STRONGEST AND TIGHTEST INSTRUCTIONS TO GREEK OFFICIALS AND RESPONSIBLE MILITARY COMMANDERS NOT TO OVERREACT TO ANY BELIEVED TURKISH PROVOCATION. EVEN SO, PAPALIGOURAS SAID, "WE DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT THE TURKS INTEND TO DO WITH THIS SHIP AND WE HAVE TO BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING."
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SEISMOLOGY, OCEANOGRAPHIC RESEARCH
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ATHENS07116
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760270-1074
From: ATHENS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760761/aaaacboy.tel
Line Count: 97
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 ATHENS 6918, 76 ANKARA 5259
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 APR 2004 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <04 AUG 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TURKISH SEISMIC VESSEL IN THE AEGEAN
TAGS: PFOR, PLOS, TU, GR, (BITSIOS, DIMITRIOS), (ALEXANDRAKIS), (PAPALIGOURAS, PANAGIOTIS), (CARAMANLIS, CONSTANTINE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006